

haven't, in so many cases, provided the place and the environment for these parents to take their children.

One big shortcoming is Congress's refusal to do its job to reauthorize the community health centers, the so-called federally qualified health centers. My State is home to several dozen federally qualified community health centers. They provide all kinds of healthcare services, in many cases, including pediatric, dentistry, all kinds of preventive care, all kinds of emergency care, and other help for so many families, particularly for low-income families, in their neighborhoods, where this can make a difference.

I want to briefly share three letters to illustrate the importance of this.

Stephanie Wiersma, the CEO of Lorain County Health & Dentistry, wrote to me 2 weeks ago before we passed the most recent continuing resolution:

We desperately plod on, doing all the right things for our health centers and patients, yet for months we have been in limbo and, frankly, sick with fear.

I worry about the impact on my staff and patients. I know the impact on recruitment of providers . . . what professional wants to chance a funding crisis to come work for a health center at this point in time?

Open provider positions means less access to care, plain and simple. Access is especially important now with all the flu and illness going around.

What Stephanie is saying is that when Congress doesn't do its job—when all of us who have health insurance that is paid for by taxpayers fail to do our jobs—these community health centers, which are professionally run and close to home for so many families, cannot plan for the future. They cannot recruit a physical therapist or a pediatric dentist or an internist or a family practice doctor. Is a professional provider, who has invested a lot of money in her education, going to want to go to a health center where Congress simply doesn't do its job in providing funding? I think Stephanie wrote that so very well.

Jared Pollick, CEO of Third Street Family Health Services in my hometown of Mansfield, wrote:

It is nearly impossible to make sound strategic decisions for our organizations without the security of our funding. We are always told both sides of the aisle love Community Health Centers. We really need them to show it with funding.

That is exactly right. I have heard my Republican colleagues talk almost ad nauseam about how much they like the Children's Health Insurance Program, how much they like the community health centers, and I think they really in their guts do. But then Senator MCCONNELL and the Republican leadership let them expire on September 30, did nothing in October, nothing in November, nothing in December. They did a tax cut for the rich. We know that, but they didn't reauthorize, didn't provide additional significant, predictable, sufficient funding for the community health centers or the Children's Health Insurance Pro-

gram. A week ago, finally, we did the Children's Health Insurance Program, but we left hanging the community health centers.

The last letter is from Julie DiRossi-King, chief operating officer for the Ohio Association of Community Health Centers, which represents 512 health centers in Ohio. She said:

We have hit that critical point . . . that the Community Health Center Program as we know and rely on it today will soon be on life support. There literally is no room for additional delay.

I appreciate that Congress finally did the right thing on the Children's Health Insurance Program. I ask Congress to do what is right for the community health centers. It will literally save lives and will matter for so many families in my State and States all over the country.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that all time be yielded back on both sides and the Senate proceed to the vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the James nomination?

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. BURR), the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. CORKER), the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN), the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN), the Senator from Idaho (Mr. RISCH), and the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. TOOMEY).

Mr. SCHUMER. I announce that the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. BLUMENTHAL), the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. CASEY), the Senator from Illinois (Mr. DURBIN), and the Senator from Missouri (Mrs. MCCASKILL), are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 89, nays 1, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 24 Ex.]

YEAS—89

Alexander	Boozman	Cassidy
Baldwin	Brown	Cochran
Barrasso	Cantwell	Collins
Bennet	Capito	Coons
Blunt	Cardin	Cornyn
Booker	Carper	Cortez Masto

Cotton	Isakson	Roberts
Crapo	Johnson	Rounds
Cruz	Jones	Rubio
Daines	Kaine	Sasse
Donnelly	Kennedy	Schatz
Duckworth	King	Schumer
Enzi	Klobuchar	Scott
Ernst	Lankford	Shaheen
Feinstein	Leahy	Shelby
Fischer	Lee	Smith
Flake	Manchin	Stabenow
Gardner	Markey	Sullivan
Gillibrand	McConnell	Tester
Graham	Menendez	Thune
Grassley	Merkley	Tillis
Harris	Murkowski	Udall
Hassan	Murphy	Van Hollen
Hatch	Murray	Warner
Heinrich	Nelson	Warren
Heitkamp	Paul	Whitehouse
Heller	Perdue	Wicker
Hirono	Peters	Wyden
Hoeven	Portman	Young
Inhofe	Reed	

NAYS—1

Sanders

NOT VOTING—10

Blumenthal	Durbin	Risch
Burr	McCaIn	Toomey
Casey	McCaskill	
Corker	Moran	

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The Senator from Alaska.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNIZING THE ALASKA PACIFIC UNIVERSITY NORDIC SKI TEAM

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, every week, I have been coming to the floor, going on 2 years now, to talk about what makes my State, the great State of Alaska, such an amazing place to live—gorgeous, untouched mountains, the glaciers, the wildlife. I have live web cams in my office. For people who want to see the bears, walrus, the salmon spawning, bears scooping up these amazing fish from the choked streams, please come on by. Most of that happens during the spring, summer, and fall. The winter, of course, is the longest season in Alaska. In my opinion, it is one of the best times to experience our State.

For those watching on TV or in the Gallery, we want to welcome you to Alaska. Come on by. You will have the trip of a lifetime. I guarantee it.

It is truly the people who make my State such a truly special place. What we try to do each week is talk about

some of those people in what we have termed our “Alaskan of the Week” celebration, to talk about community, to talk about so many Alaskans who are helping not only their State and their community but their country, generous yet tough and competitive people who make up our Wonderful State.

Many of them get very excited when the snow starts to fall. They strap on their skis and they fly through the snow. One group of Alaskans who every winter strap on their skis and train—actually train all year round and compete on the hundreds of miles of Anchorage’s trail system—is the Alaska Pacific University Nordic Ski Program. Hands down, it is the very best ski team in America. They are our Alaskans of the Week.

Let me tell you a little bit about the APU Nordic Ski Program. Led by Coach Erik Flora, Alaska’s APU Nordic Ski team year after year produces some of our Nation’s finest athletes, who compete in races all across the world, including the upcoming Winter Olympics in Korea. As I mentioned, year after year, APU athletes are simply the best cross-country skiers in the Nation. Their depth of talent was put on display earlier this month at the U.S. Cross Country Championships in Anchorage, where they took 11 out of the 24 podium spots in the senior races and 8 out of the 24 junior podium spots. Think about that. One team dominated the U.S. Cross Country Championships this year.

They train year-round. In the summer, the ski team trains on Eagle Glacier, accessible by a 10-minute helicopter ride from Girdwood, AK. As the Anchorage Daily News put it, this unique training area has “been a springboard to APU’s international and domestic success [and dominance]. Flora and his staff have groomed serpentine, undulating trails there that mimic [international] courses” on a glacier in Alaska in the summer. That is great training. It is year-round.

In addition to training and coaching these world-class athletes, the APU Nordic Ski Center also has a popular junior program, which helps develop the next generation of Olympic skiers.

I have had the honor to get to know some of these skiers, these wonderful athletes, over the past few years. They certainly would make Alaskans proud, but I think they would make all Americans proud. They are great young men and women who are dedicated, disciplined, humble, hard-working, and very smart. They are students; they are very, very good students. I even had the opportunity to go and train with them occasionally. I am more of a downhill skier than a cross-country skier. I went with them in the fall, when there wasn’t any snow on the ground, to do some mountain interval training, running with them up and down the mountains. To witness and train with these world-class athletes was an amazing experience. I must

admit, it was a difficult experience for me. I think I was smoked after about 10 minutes with them, and they had about a 2-hour workout session on the mountain. It gave me a sense of how hard they work and what dedicated, world-class athletes we have in my hometown.

Next month, several of these APU skiers will travel to Korea to represent the United States of America at the Winter Olympics, the way they have in previous Olympics. They are top skiers for America. Let me name a few.

First and I would say foremost, Kikkan Randall, America’s most decorated cross-country skier in U.S. history and an Alaskan icon—she will participate in her fifth Winter Olympics. Let me say that again. She will participate in her fifth Winter Olympics. That is an incredible record for any American athlete, winter or summer games. She is also a wonderful person. She is very, very community-oriented. Alongside her will be APU teammates Sadie and Erik Bjornsen—they are brother and sister—Rosie Brennan, and maybe, hopefully, even a few more. Additionally, their APU teammate Jess Yeaton, who was born in Australia but grew up in Alaska, will ski for the Australian cross-country ski team. You are getting the picture. This is a group of people who are going to do very, very well in the Olympics and are going to represent our country and other countries proudly.

Cross-country skiing is woven into the fabric of Alaska’s winter community. It brings people together, and it helps build community. So many of our skiers, including and especially the APU team, are also generous and kind in helping others learn how to ski and graciously host skiers from all across the country, as was on full display during the recent U.S. Cross Country Championships.

On behalf of all Alaskans—really, on behalf of all U.S. Senators—I wish the team good luck in Korea. We will be watching. I know you will make Alaskans and our fellow Americans very proud as you compete on the world stage once again. Once again, thanks for all you do. Thanks for your tremendous hard work and dedication. And to the APU Nordic ski team, thanks again for being our Alaskans of the Week.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The remarks of Mr. HATCH pertaining to the introduction of S. 2344 are printed in today’s RECORD under “Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.”)

CONFIRMATION OF SAM BROWNBACK

Mr. HATCH. Now, Mr. President, turning to another subject, I would like to speak for a few minutes on Sam Brownback’s recent confirmation as Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom. I’ve known Governor Brownback for many years, and I am confident he will serve our Nation well in advancing and defending religious freedom across the world.

Throughout my Senate service, it has been my privilege to defend religious freedom. In 1990, for example, I served as one of the principal authors of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, or RFRA, a crucially important piece of legislation that prohibits the government from substantially burdening a person’s exercise of religion unless doing so is necessary to further a compelling government interest.

The bill passed the Senate 97 to 3 and passed the House without recorded opposition. This remarkable, broad support demonstrated that religious liberty is a rare issue that unites Americans of all stripes.

That unity of purpose extends to our commitment to protect this fundamental right abroad. In 1948, the United States was one of the original signers of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaims that every person has the right to freedom of religion.

Fifty years later, Congress unanimously passed the International Religious Freedom Act. I was proud to support this act, which declares religious freedom to be a universal human right, a pillar of our Nation, and a fundamental freedom. The law established the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and created the position of Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, the position to which Governor Brownback was just confirmed.

As evidenced by his work here in the Senate, Governor Brownback truly understands the need for leaders who will stand up for religious liberty and ensure that all people—no matter where they live—are able to worship how, where, or what they may.

During his 14 years in this body, Governor Brownback was involved in a wide range of issues related to religious freedom. Governor Brownback knows firsthand how crucial the Commission is in keeping our Nation and world leaders informed about the status of religious freedom throughout the world.

It seems unfathomable in this day and age, but thousands and even hundreds of thousands of our brothers and sisters throughout the world are being imprisoned, tortured, and even executed for their personal convictions. In recent remarks, Secretary of State Tillerson discussed the prevalence of religious persecution and intolerance. He noted that almost 80 percent of the global population lives with restrictions on their freedom of religion.